

Snooping by the Military

INQUIRER
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MILITARY intelligence at the Pentagon has not acted very intelligently in first denying and then attempting to sidestep charges by Senator Ervin of North Carolina that Army intelligence agents have spied on hundreds of civilians in Illinois over the past two years—including Senator Stevenson and former Governor Kerner.

Defense Secretary Laird, in a belated move to get off the hook, has promised that the Senator's charges will be investigated by the Pentagon and that military intelligence will be reorganized early next year to strengthen civilian control.

The reorganization should be helpful if it can be implemented. As a practical matter the abolishment of military control over military intelligence may be harder to achieve in fact than in theory. Orders from

the secretary of defense, and reports to him, presumably would pass through uniformed personnel en route to and from intelligence agents.

In any case the Pentagon cannot be counted on to conduct a thorough and impartial investigation of its own intelligence activities—and certainly would not put them in the public spotlight. Senator Ervin, who is chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights, should proceed with plans for an investigation of military intelligence activities in Illinois and wherever else a need for inquiry may become apparent.

Military surveillance of civilians not only should be halted but those responsible for snooping in the past should be required to explain what they were trying to accomplish and for what purpose.